

NEWS

Iowans express concern about state plan for Medicaid work requirements

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URBANDALE — Iowans stressed the importance of health coverage and the difficulties of obtaining government recognition of medical conditions at the first public comment session on state’s effort to add work requirements to its expanded Medicaid program.

The Iowa Department of Health and Human Services is seeking a waiver from the federal government allow it to implement work requirements for the Iowa Health and Wellness Plan, or IHAWP. The public hearing Wednesday at the Urbandale Public Library was the first of three meetings for public comment required by the waiver submitted to the U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

IHAWP is the Medicaid expansion program signed into law by former Gov. Terry Branstad, a Republican. It provides public health insurance for low-income Iowans at or below 133% of the federal poverty level who do not qualify for regular Medicaid coverage — people between the ages of 19 to 64 who do not have a disability.

The waiver, announced by Gov. Kim Reynolds earlier in April, proposes requiring IHAWP recipients to work 100 hours per month to remain eligible for coverage. There are other ways to meet this requirement — a person can continue receiving state health coverage if they are enrolled in an education or job skills program, or if they earn the equivalent in wages to working 100 hours a month at the state minimum wage, \$7.25 per hour.

There are some exceptions for the work requirements. People who are considered medically frail or medically exempt under Medicaid would not have to meet the work requirements, nor would individuals caring for a child under age 6, who have a high-risk pregnancy, or are in substance abuse treatment programs for up to six months. The waiver request also states that individuals who “provide proof of good cause as defined by HHS” would be exempt, but did not include details on what standards would be used by the state department for assessing these claims.

At the hearing, several speakers talked about their own experiences or time helping others applying for public assistance coverage under the current Medicaid program. Nancy Lynch of Des Moines, a former school social worker, said she worked with parents of children with disabilities who were denied services and assistance — and said she believes work requirements would add another hurdle for people in need accessing health coverage and care.

“My job was to help support parents who had children with very special needs that needed help — needed help with health care, needed help with services — and I saw how difficult it was for them to receive those services,” Lynch said. “No one got it on the first time. Everybody had to apply three and four times. They’d say the same thing, but they had to reapply and reapply and reapply. So they had to kind of beat down the system until they were finally accepted. ... And my big concern is that these work requirements will add more barriers to people who need these services, they will lose the support they need.”

Robbin Mensching of West Des Moines said she was concerned about how HHS would assess mental illnesses and provide exemptions. Speaking about her own experience struggling to receive an official diagnosis of having a mental illness, she said it can be difficult for people with mental health issues to be recognized as having a medical issue. After receiving care, Mensching said she was able to more fully participate in life, but that denying that coverage could impact people’s ability to join the workforce or care for their families.

“I want to know how they’re

going to handle covering these people, because there are a lot of people that have been like me,” Mensching said “Anxiety, depression, panic attacks — it’s disabling.”

Work requirements would be enforced through reporting. HHS stated that people on IHAWP would be required to report information showing the work requirements were met every six months. The department plans to create a mobile application for IHAWP members to submit required information showing their compliance with the work requirements if HHS does not already have the information available. If the required information is not provided, the individual’s coverage would be suspended.

Mary Nelle Trefz, the advocacy network director of Iowa ACES 360, called for the state to share information about the cost of implementing work requirements, pointing to the need for the Iowa state government to create a new information technology system and train staff to implement and support the reporting requirements.

As Reynolds and HHS pursue a waiver for implementing work requirements, the Iowa Legislature has also moved this session to pass a bill implementing expanded Medicaid work requirements. There are some differences between the HHS and legislative policies — the bill proposes an 80-hour monthly work requirement, and includes “trigger” language that would require the state to end IHAWP coverage for all recipients if the federal government revokes work requirements in the future after they were approved.

The legislation also includes an appropriation of roughly \$8.2 million, according to the Legislative Services Agency, to set up the needed IT system for administering reporting requirements under the proposal. The funding to create this IT system is not a part of the HHS waiver request, Trefz said.

“That pending legislation also included support for IT, funding for that — but that legislation has not passed yet,” Trefz said. “Those dollars have not been appropriated. So how will the state ensure the necessary infrastructure is in place?”

Multiple speakers expressed frustration that the HHS staff who hosted the meeting did not answer several of the questions or direct responses from HHS or other state leadership posed about certain details of the policy or how it would be implemented, or if there would be changes made to address any of their concerns. Staff at the meeting said the comments and questions would be shared with state leaders, and would be used to answer questions about work requirements in future communications.

Mensching said she felt work requirements were already a “done deal” in Iowa, but said she believed it was important for Iowans — especially those who would be impacted by the change — to speak out.

“I would have ended up living on the street at one point in my life (without health coverage), and then you’ve got all these other things that go with that — somebody getting health care for me, the police would be involved — I mean, it just goes on and on,” Mensching said. “It’s so much more efficient and humane to just give people coverage so that they can live a normal life.”

Trefz, alongside Stacy Frelund with the American Heart Association, said they were creating a “protect Medicaid” coalition to coordinate organizing efforts to oppose the new work requirements.

There will be another public hearing held on the waiver request, on April 29 at 2 p.m. at Marshalltown Public Library. Comments can also be submitted through email and by mail through May 15, with information available on the public notice website for the waiver.



Contributed photo

Pictured from left are DAR Regent Amy Sunleaf, Jacob Litterer, Holly Lamp, Laura Martens, Spencer Martin, and Michelle Johnson, Good Citizens chair.

DAR announces Student Good Citizen Awards

HERALD STAFF REPORT

The Lawrence Van Hook Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution honored seniors from five high schools in Jackson and Clinton Counties at a Good Citizens Tea held this spring at the DeWitt Community Library. The students and their families were welcomed by Regent Amy Sunleaf and chapter Secretary Karen Bradway gave a history and overview of the NSDAR Good Citizens competition.

- The students honored were:
- Holly Lamp, daughter of Darlene and Perry Lamp, Northeast High School
 - Jacob Litterer, son of Jenny and Litterer, Marquette Catholic School
 - Laura Martens, daughter of Michelle and Steven Martens, Central DeWitt High School
 - Spencer Martin, son of Crystal and Dan Martin, Maquoketa High School
 - Tate Giesemann, Bellevue Community High School was

unable to attend

The DAR Good Citizens program recognizes outstanding young people who exhibit the qualities of good citizenship in their homes, schools, and communities. The program is open to all high school seniors enrolled in public or private schools accredited and in good standing with their state board of education. The student selected as the school’s DAR Good Citizen must have the following qualities:

- Dependability (truthfulness, honesty, punctuality, and being worthy of trust)
 - Service (cooperation, helpfulness, responsibility)
 - Leadership (personality, self-control, initiative, decision-maker)
 - Patriotism (unselfish loyalty to American ideals)
- Michelle Johnson, Good Citizens Chair, introduced the students and she and Regent Sunleaf presented them with a DAR Good Citizens pin, certificate, and a red, white, and blue honor cord to wear at

graduation. Each of the four students in attendance read their essay and was given a gift bag containing a copy of the US Constitution, a Flag Etiquette brochure, a history of the Pledge of Allegiance, a description of the Good Citizens program, and a DAR bookmark.

The DAR Good Citizens program and Scholarship Contest is intended to encourage and reward the qualities of good citizenship in our students. DAR Good Citizens who enter the scholarship contest are eligible for the awards at the state, division, and national levels. A national winner will be invited to Washington, D.C., to attend Continental Congress and will be awarded a \$10,000 scholarship, an inscribed silver bowl and a certificate.

Following the presentation, Dr. Arthur Sunleaf, Vice President of Student Development and Dean of Students at Loras College in Dubuque, gave the DAR Good Citizen-

ship Address. He reminded everyone that the people who make the biggest difference in your life are the people who care about you and not the ones with the most credentials, the most money, or the most awards. Dr. Sunleaf also encouraged the students to lead with kindness throughout their lives.

Sunleaf announced Martens from Central DeWitt High School was the chapter scholarship winner and presented her with a check for \$200. After photos were taken, the students and their families were invited to stay for refreshments.

The National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) is a women’s service organization whose members can trace their lineage to an individual who contributed to securing American independence during the Revolutionary War. The Lawrence Van Hook Chapter was organized on April 18, 1970.

Red dye spill expected to enter Maquoketa River

HERALD STAFF REPORT

MAQUOKETA — On Tuesday around 11 a.m., a 330 gallon tote of wood mulch dye was punctured on a semi truck at the Kwik Star at 102

David Street in Maquoketa, according to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources. Dye entered nearby Prairie Creek via a storm drain, turning the creek red. DNR staff were on site yesterday and spoke with both the responsible party and cleanup crews. Cleanup is ongoing. Prairie Creek empties into the Maquoketa River and the river is expected to take on a red color sometime

today. Impacts to fish are not expected and no dead fish have been observed. DNR environmental staff are on site again today to provide technical assistance to aid cleanup efforts.

Catholics pay their final respects to Pope Francis

COLLEEN BARRY AND NICOLE WINFIELD
ASSOCIATED PRESS

VATICAN CITY — Thousands of people began filing through St. Peter’s Basilica to pay their final respects to Pope Francis on Wednesday at the start of three days of public viewing ahead of his funeral.

Thronges of the faithful made their way to the 16th century basilica’s main altar where Francis’ open wooden casket was perched, as Swiss Guards stood at attention. Over the coming days, tens of thousands of people are expected to pass through, and the Vatican said it may extend the viewer hours even longer due to high turnout. In the first 8 1/2 hours, 19,430 people paid their respects to the pope.

Francis was laid out in red robes, clasping a rosary and wearing a bishop’s miter, the traditional pointed head-dress. Mourners waited hours to reach the casket, which was behind a cordon. Some held their cell phones aloft as they neared to snap photos in what has become a modern ritual.

“It gave me chills,” said Ivenes Bianco, as she left. She was in Rome from the southern city of Brindisi for medical care, and came to pay her respects. “He was important to me because he encouraged co-existence. He brought many people together.”

Francis’ casket wasn’t put on an elevated bier — as was the case with past popes — but placed on a ramp, facing the pews. It was in keeping with his wishes for the rituals surrounding a papal funeral to be simplified to reflect his belief that the pope’s role is that of simple pastor, not world leader.

Cardinals, meanwhile, met



Cecilia Fabiano | Lapresse

The body of Pope Francis is carried through St. Peter’s Square to St. Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican, Wednesday, where he will lie in state for three days.

in private to finalize preparations for Saturday’s funeral and plan the conclave to elect Francis’ successor.

Francis died on Monday at age 88, capping a 12-year pontificate characterized by his concern for the poor and message of inclusion, but also some criticism from conservatives who sometimes felt alienated by his progressive bent.

Francis first lay in state in the hotel where he lived, in a private viewing for Vatican residents and the papal household. Images released by the Vatican on Tuesday showed the pope in an open casket, his hands folded over a rosary.

Wednesday opened with the bells of St. Peter’s tolling as pallbearers carried Francis’ body into the basilica, in a procession through the piazza where he had delivered his final goodbye. Francis had made a surprise pope-mobile tour through the faithful on

Easter Sunday, after his nurse assured him he could despite his frail health from a bout of pneumonia and long hospitalization.

Cardinal Kevin Farrell, who is running the Vatican until a new pope is elected, led the procession to the altar, with clouds of incense and the choir chanting the Litany of Saints hymn. In pairs, cardinals approached the casket, bowed and made a sign of the cross, followed by bishops, ushers, priests and nuns.

Then the doors were opened to the public. There was the squeak of sneakers, the rustling of kneeling nuns, the murmur of quiet prayers. A cough, a child’s cry.

“We knew there were many people, so we approached this with calmness,” said Rosa Morghen from Naples, adding: “It’s the feeling one experiences when a family member passes away, as he is a father, a grandfather who has gone.”

The public viewing ends Friday at 7 p.m., after which Francis’ casket will be closed and sealed.

The funeral has been set for Saturday at 10 a.m. in St. Peter’s Square. It will be attended by world leaders, including U.S. President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodmyr Zelenskyy.

Francis’ death and funeral will usher in a carefully orchestrated period of transition in the 1.4 billion-strong Catholic Church, with cardinals gathering over the coming days before entering a conclave, the secretive ritual voting in the Sistine Chapel to elect a new pope.

There are 133 cardinals who are under 80 years old and eligible to vote, after two bowed out for health reasons, and the new pontiff will likely come from within their ranks. The conclave is not expected to begin before May 5.

